

ONWARD TO IRAN AND THE "WAR ON TYRANNY"

The US Bush administration is moving closer to confrontation with Iran over not just the nuclear weapons issue but also over Iran's plans to open an oil bourse and keep control of its own oil reserves.

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In the weeks after 9/11/2001, US President George W. Bush announced the existence of an "Axis of Evil" comprised of the nations of Iraq, Iran and North Korea. In speeches that followed, he implied that he regarded it desirable to achieve "regime change" in all three countries. In the years since, the first of the three, Iraq, has been invaded and reduced to a desolate landscape of violence and hopelessness.

In speeches since the November 2004 elections, Bush and his new Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have spoken of a "War on Tyranny", which is presumably intended to replace the now-shopworn "War on Terror". The semantic shift reveals much about Washington's plans for the next four years. The new campaign will imply no need to justify pre-emptive attacks based on other nations' possession of banned weapons. Washington can simply target regimes it dislikes, even democratic ones, on the basis of their reputed "tyrannical" nature. Evidently the manipulation of elections has become such an exact science (not only within the US, but elsewhere as well) that "freedom" and "democracy" can be exported wholesale in slogan form with considerable propaganda effect, but with no danger whatever to the interests of those who call the shots.

Potential targets for the War on Tyranny, compiled from the statements of various government officials, include Iran, Syria, Sudan, Algeria, Yemen, Malaysia, Somalia, Indonesia and Georgia—countries strategically critical to the Bush administration's goal of controlling global energy resource extraction and transportation routes. But in every leaked or published list, Iran is the first nation mentioned.

There are good reasons to assume that a US campaign against Iran will commence within months, and that this will serve to open the next and much expanded phase of what is actually the "Global Oil War" of the 21st century. Because of Tehran's connections with other countries troublesome to the United States—including China, Russia and Venezuela—the campaign in Iran will be the key to a planned clean sweep of nations impeding America's "full-spectrum dominance". What follows is partly speculation; however, there is now enough information available upon which to base plausible conjectures as to intentions, likely actions and consequences.

IRAN: BRIEF HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

But first, let us consider the geographic and historical context of the impending events.

The country now known as Iran (ancient Persia) was a centre for pre-Islamic Indo-European culture from the second millennium BCE, and for Islamic culture from the fifth century CE. It was the birthplace of Zoroastrianism, the home of Sufi poet Rumi, a site of empires and a frequent object of conquest.

In the early 19th century, Persia began to fall under the rival commercial and imperial attentions of Britain and Russia, serving as a pivot for the Great Game of Eurasian geopolitics.

In 1901, an Australian explorer named William Knox D'Arcy managed to persuade the Persian shah to grant him mineral rights to the country for 60 years in exchange for £20,000 and a 16 per cent share of the proceeds. D'Arcy then began prospecting for oil, which he found in 1908. Iranian history from then on has hinged on this discovery. Britain meanwhile had realised the strategic importance of petroleum for the future of industrial production and warfare (the British war fleet was converting from coal to oil) and was seeking secure supplies of the resource in the Middle East. Sidney Reilly, the famous British spy, talked D'Arcy into parting with his contract, and thus was born the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which would later become British Petroleum or BP.

In 1921, Reza Khan, an army officer, organised a *coup d'état* that left him as the country's shah and founder of the Pahlavi dynasty. The new shah acted to modernise the country while also managing to negotiate better terms with BP. In 1935, with the nation coming under increasing pressure from both Britain and Russia, the shah encouraged German commercial enterprise and changed the country's name from Persia to Iran (Farsi for "Aryan"). Britain and the Soviet Union simultaneously invaded Iran in 1941 and quickly overcame Iranian resistance. Reza Shah abdicated in favour of his son, who ascended the throne as Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. In September 1943, Iran declared war on Germany.

After the war, Iran's prime minister, a land-owning aristocrat named Mohammad Mossadeq, nationalised BP's exclusive concession in order to satisfy the country's growing need for revenue to pay for modernisation. With this nationalisation of its oil fields, Iran would come to serve as an example for other resource-rich Third World countries. Mossadeq, a flamboyant populist leader, spoke prominently at the United Nations and was the 1951 *Time* magazine Man of the Year. Britain, furious, blockaded Iran and took its case against Mossadeq to the World Court—which ruled in Iran's favour.

In 1953, British intelligence and the CIA colluded to overthrow Mossadeq, with General Norman Schwarzkopf—father of the leader of the American forces during the *Desert Storm* operation in 1990—playing a key role in the plot. Once Mossadeq was gone (he spent his declining years under house arrest and died in 1967), the shah assumed dictatorial powers, granted oil rights to a consortium of British and American companies and established close ties with the United States.

Over the ensuing quarter-century, Shah Reza Pahlavi led efforts to industrialise his country, commissioning nuclear power plants from France and Germany during the early 1970s. In 1978, he refused BP's proposal for a 25-year renewal of its oil extraction agreement. The shah had outlived his usefulness.

In his book *A Century of War: Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order* (Pluto Press, 2004, rev. ed.), William Engdahl sets forth the view that the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty and the installation of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 were engineered by British intelligence and the CIA as part of a Washington strategy, proudly masterminded by Zbigniew Brzezinski, to stoke the fires of radical Islam throughout the Middle East in order to undermine efforts at Arab nationalism. The thought was that countries like Iran and Iraq could be played off against one another, then later the US could sweep in and pick up the pieces. The radical Islamists would also serve to undermine Soviet ties in the region; they were at the centre of the Afghanistan war against the USSR and assisted in the later Balkans campaigns. They also would later provide a convenient new enemy to replace the Soviet Union after the end of the Cold War.

Covert connections between the new Iranian theocratic leadership and the incoming Reagan administration in the United States were demonstrated by the so-called October Surprise, which spelled the end of Jimmy Carter's presidency, and the guns-for-hostages deal, also known as the Iran–Contra scandal.

The Iran–Iraq war (1980–88) appears to have been covertly

fomented by the United States (which encouraged Saddam Hussein to attack) in order to weaken both countries—Iran being supported by Syria and Libya and receiving weaponry from North Korea and China (as well as the US), and Iraq enjoying wider support among both Arab and Western nations with the Soviet Union its largest arms supplier. War deaths were estimated at up to 1.5 million.

Khomeini died in 1989, and political power in Iran passed largely to the president, Rafsanjani, a more moderate leader (though the mullahs retained supreme authority). Rafsanjani, who sought better relations with the West in order to attract investment capital, was succeeded in 1997 by Khatami, the current president, also a moderate, who has pursued improved relations with the US and Saudi Arabia. However, as an Islamic republic, Iran often spouts anti-American rhetoric, and has recently courted closer economic and security ties with Russia and China.

Iran's oil endowment is both its treasure and its curse. According to Colin Campbell (writing in ASPO newsletter no. 32, August 2003), about 120 billion barrels of oil have been found in Iran, which made it a significant producer throughout the 20th century:

Most of the discovery to date lies in a few giant fields...which were mainly found by the Consortium in the 1960s based on prospects long known to BP's explorers... There have been recent reports of major discoveries at Bushehr, but it turns out that they are almost certainly long-known deposits of high sulphur heavy oil of no particular significance... Future discovery is here estimated at about 8 billion barrels, probably mainly coming from the offshore.

Campbell notes that Iran, a co-founder of OPEC in 1961, has the

"typical twin-peaked [oil production] profile of an OPEC country":

The first peak was passed in 1974 at 6.1 Mb/d, falling to a low of 1.2 Mb/d in 1980, before recovering to 3.4 Mb/d in 2002. Some reports suggest that depletion of present reserves is running as high as 7%, which may reflect operational shortcomings and lack of investment...

[P]roduction could in resource terms rise to a second peak in 2009 at almost 5 Mb/d before commencing its terminal decline at 2.6% a year, but operational and investment constraints may prevent such a level being reached in practice, with 3–4 Mb/d peak being perhaps more likely. Naturally, any new invasion would radically affect this forecast.

Campbell also notes: "The country's gas resources were very large indeed, totalling some 1000 Tcf."

Iran currently exports about 2.3 million barrels of oil per day (the world uses about 85 Mb/d).

WHY WOULD THE US ATTACK IRAN?

At first thought, it seems a US attack on Iran would seem foolish, given that the American military is already bogged down in neighbouring Iraq. However, there are three important reasons why the Bush administration might be more than willing to take up the immense risks involved.

Once Mossadeq was gone, the shah assumed dictatorial powers, granted oil rights to a consortium of British and American companies and established close ties with the United States.

The first, which is the one most widely discussed, is that Iran is reputedly seeking to develop nuclear weapons. Most Western intelligence agencies estimate that Iran is three to five years away from being able to produce bombs from scratch. However, missile delivery systems are already in place that could loft warheads to cities in Israel or to American bases throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. America is willing to countenance Pakistan's and Israel's nuclear capability, but these nations work with the US; Iran, in contrast, is independent and is making its own security deals with China, Russia and Venezuela, and would be considered a threat to Israel. From the Iranian perspective, though, the development of a nuclear deterrent makes perfect sense in view of the recent US invasion of neighbouring Iraq.

The second reason has to do with the challenge that Tehran presents to the US economy. According to recent news articles emanating from Iran, that country is planning to establish a regional oil stock exchange. A December 28, 2004, article in the London-based online publication IranMania.com notes:

Iran will move a step closer to establishing its much-publicised oil exchange next week, when the Oil Ministry and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance are set to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU), which will set the ground for the high-profile initiative.

Hossein Talebi, the National Iranian Oil Company's director for information technology affairs, told Fars news agency that the project would enter the executive phase immediately after the MoU is signed.

The official further said that petrochemicals, crude oil and oil and gas products will be traded at the petroleum exchange.

"The oil exchange would strive to make Iran the main hub for oil deals in the region," he said, adding that most deals will be conducted through the Internet...

Iran announced in September its petroleum exchange will become operational by March 2006...

(Source: <http://www.iranmania.com>)

As William Clark argues in his forthcoming book *Petrodollar Warfare* (New Society, summer 2005), the denomination of global oil sales in US dollars has kept the American dollar artificially strong throughout the period from 1974 to present, enabling Washington to run up huge foreign-funded government debt and trade deficits. Tehran's action, whether or not deliberately calculated to do so, could cause a dollar crash.

Iraq was the first nation to announce intentions to sell oil for euros instead of dollars (in November 2000), and one of the first acts of the provisional government put in place by invading US forces was to return oil sales to the dollar standard. In an article titled "The Real Reasons Why Iran is the Next Target: The Emerging Euro-denominated International Oil Marker" (October 27, 2004, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/CLA410A.html>), Clark notes:

...Similar to the Iraq war, upcoming operations against Iran relate to the macroeconomics of 'petrodollar recycling' and the unpublicized but real challenge to US dollar supremacy from the euro as an alternative oil transaction currency...

Candidly stated, 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' was a war designed to install a pro-US puppet in Iraq, establish multiple US military bases before the onset of Peak Oil, and to reconvert Iraq back to petrodollars while hoping to thwart further OPEC momentum towards the euro as an alternative oil-transaction currency...

From a purely economic and monetary perspective, a petroeuro system is a logical development given that the European Union imports more oil from OPEC producers than does the US, and the EU accounts for 45% of imports into the Middle East...

One of the Federal Reserve's nightmares may begin to unfold in 2005 or 2006, when it appears international buyers will have a choice of buying a barrel of oil for \$50 dollars on the NYMEX and IPE—or purchase a barrel of oil for E37 – E40 via the Iranian Bourse...

A successful Iranian Bourse would solidify the petroeuro as an alternative oil-transaction currency, and thereby end the petrodollar's hegemonic status as the monopoly oil currency...

A third reason for the US to invade Iran arises from long-term American geopolitical strategy: Iran is one of the few important oil exporters without a US military presence (others include Russia and Venezuela). Further, Iran is strategically located between Afghanistan and Iraq, bridging the Middle East and Central Asia, and its control is thus essential for US domination of those oil-rich regions.

With the approach of Peak Oil, the world has entered the end-game phase of the industrial interval. If the US does not gain a stranglehold on world resource streams, then China—now the world's main consumer of steel, grain, meat and coal—will do so. Already China is gaining long-term oil contracts in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Venezuela and Nigeria; the Chinese are even seeking a sizeable portion of Canadian oil production and have actually attempted to buy an American oil company (Unocal).

While on the surface the US and China are politely trading (Americans buy cheap Chinese goods, the Chinese invest their earnings in US Treasury Bills in order to enable Americans to



"The President's policy is quite strategic. We only invade countries he can pronounce."

afford even more Chinese imports), beneath the surface both are angling for a superior position as the final game begins. If the US merely stands by, its economy will be destroyed when China eventually sells off its dollar holdings, and America will land on the ash heap of failed empires.

The latter's only hope of continued glory is to play its remaining strong card—its spectacularly lethal weapons of mass death—in an effort to maintain control of global resource flows. The US faces immense risks in an attack, as will be discussed below. However, given its stated priorities, it can hardly demur from taking up those risks.

EVIDENCE THAT AN ATTACK IS BEING PLANNED

In an article titled "The Coming Wars", posted on January 17 and published in *The New Yorker* (January 24–31, 2005), veteran investigative journalist Seymour Hersh reported that US

commando teams have been operating in Iran for months, carrying out secret reconnaissance missions to learn about nuclear, chemical and missile sites in preparation for possible air strikes. Hersh also says that the administration's aims could include not just the thwarting of Iran's nuclear ambitions, but regime change as well.

Citing a former high-level intelligence official, Hersh claims that "Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff shortly after the election and told them, in essence, that the naysayers had been heard and the American people did not accept their message":

"This is a war against terrorism, and Iraq is just one campaign. The Bush Administration is looking at this as a huge war zone," the former high-level intelligence official told me. "Next, we're going to have the Iranian campaign. We've declared war and the bad guys, wherever they are, are the enemy. This is the last hurrah—we've got four years, and want to come out of this saying we won the war on terrorism."

(Source: <http://tinyurl.com/3nqvo>)

While Bush administration officials dispute Hersh's allegations, other reporters and news agencies are publishing corroborating information. An Al Jazeera article of February 6 ("U.S.–Israel plan to strike Iran's nuclear sites finalized") claims:

Experts from the US Defense Department, the Pentagon and Israel have put final touches to a plan to launch a military strike targeting Iran's nuclear facilities, experts at the European Commission based in Brussels revealed on Sunday.

The experts added that the implementation of this plan rested on a number of factors including the US continuous efforts to hamper the EU–Iranian negotiations to persuade Iran to suspend all activities related to uranium enrichment, with the aim of justifying a military strike against the Islamic republic if it refused to bow to US pressures...

Yesterday, American news sources reported that US senators have set up a review panel of the CIA's intelligence on Iran in order to try and avoid the pitfalls that marked the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq.

(Source: <http://tinyurl.com/47mkm>)

Meanwhile, George W. Bush has announced the appointment of Elliott Abrams, previously in charge of Middle East affairs, to the office of deputy national security adviser. Abrams, who pleaded guilty in 1991 to withholding information from Congress (and was pardoned by George H. W. Bush), will now be supervising the current president's strategy for "advancing democracy", according to the *Washington Post* (February 3). Many regard Abrams as one of the foremost proponents of the neoconservative agenda in Washington; he authored the chapter on the Middle East in the 2000 blueprint for US foreign policy by the Project on the New American Century (PNAC).

Many observers do not appreciate how different the neoconservative mindset is from that of the previous foreign policy consensus. For example, the neoconservatives view America's war against the Vietnamese as a mistake only in that insufficient force was used: several neocons have opined that the US should have

employed whatever means were necessary, including nuclear weapons, to prevail in that effort.

PNAC literature bristles with complaints, accusations and threats directed against Tehran. During the early months of the first term in the George W. Bush administration, neoconservatives were often quoted as saying: "Everybody wants to go to Baghdad; real men want to go to Tehran."

Weekly Standard editor William Kristol, on a PNAC website (July 20, 2004, <http://tinyurl.com/6exnl>), after a litany of indictments of Iran, concludes: "We do need a coherent, serious policy toward Iran; one of containment, pressure, accountability and, ultimately, regime change."

President Bush, in his State of the Union address on February 2, pointedly noted: "Today, Iran remains the world's primary state sponsor of terror, pursuing nuclear weapons while depriving its people of the freedom they seek and deserve."

This past month, Senator Rick Santorum (R–Pennsylvania) was said

to be at work on the "Iran Freedom and Support Act", a bill apparently designed to help prepare America psychologically for an attack on Tehran. Santorum told Fox News: "By supporting the people of Iran, and through greater outreach to pro-democracy groups, we will hopefully foster a peaceful transition to democracy in Iran. The bill also notes the futility of working with the Iranian government."

Meanwhile, new US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is sending conflicting signals. On February 4, she claimed a US attack on Iran "is simply not on the agenda", though she would not say whether the US supports regime change in the country. Yet only five days later, she warned Iran of consequences if its nuclear program is not abandoned. One can hardly help but recall similar contradictory statements from officials in the year leading up to the invasion of Iraq. On February 17, George W. Bush pledged to support Israel if it bombs Iran in an effort to destroy the Islamic regime's capacity to make an atomic bomb. Asked whether he would back Israel if it raided Tehran's nuclear facilities, Bush said: "Clearly, if I was the leader of Israel and I'd listened to some of the statements by the Iranian ayatollahs that

Seymour Hersh reported that US commando teams have been operating in Iran for months, carrying out secret reconnaissance missions ... in preparation for possible air strikes.

regarded the security of my country, I'd be concerned about Iran having a nuclear weapon as well. And in that Israel is our ally, and in that we've made a very strong commitment to support Israel, we will support Israel if her security is threatened."

Meanwhile, rumours mount. On February 18, Scott Ritter, a former US Marine and UN weapons inspector in Iraq, in a talk delivered to a packed house in Olympia's Capitol Theater in Washington State, claimed on the basis of inside information that Bush has "signed off" on plans to bomb Iran in June 2005.

While European diplomatic efforts seek to head off a military confrontation, "In private," as Guy Dinsmore notes in a *Financial Times* article of February 14 ("Would Condi and Dubbya Really Start Another War?"), "European officials say the best they can do is to buy time, perhaps to the end of the year".

POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF AN ATTACK ON IRAN

What would be the likely results of an American attack on Iran?

In the fall of 2004, *The Atlantic* conducted a war-games think-tank, as reported in the December 2004 issue in an article by James Fallows ("Will Iran be Next?"). The magazine hired retired military strategists to come together and, in discussions, play out three possible scenarios:

- a limited attack on Iran's nuclear research facilities;
- an air attack on the Republican Guard designed to destroy Iranian overall military capability; and
- an all-out invasion aimed at regime change.

Each ended with unacceptable consequences. The attack on nuclear facilities, the participants agreed, would be unlikely to stop research and would probably only redouble Iranian resolve to develop nuclear weapons. An air attack on Iranian military units would provoke retaliation against US forces in Iraq. And a full-on invasion would entail US casualties and an ongoing occupation and guerrilla warfare.

The war-games leader, retired Air Force Col. Sam Gardiner (who ran war games at the National War College for more than two decades), summarised the group's conclusions: "After all this effort, I am left with two simple sentences for policymakers: You have no military solution for the issues of Iran. And you have to make diplomacy work."

Nevertheless, despite the counterproductiveness of the likely outcomes, the war-gamers could not rule out the likelihood that the US would pursue one or more of these strategies. "Companies deciding which kinds of toothpaste to market have much more rigorous, established decision-making procedures to refer to than the most senior officials of the US government deciding whether or not to go to war," said Michael Mazarr, a professor of national-security strategy at the National War College. Thomas Hammes, a Marine expert in counterinsurgency, added: "You can never assume that just because a government knows something is unviable, it won't go ahead and do it. The Iraqis knew it was unviable to invade Iran, but they still did it. History shows that countries make very serious mistakes."

The neoconservatives appear to have a view of the situation that is not reflected in these war-games. They evidently believe that, after the first strikes, the Iranian regime will simply collapse. Hersh (in *The New Yorker*, January 24–31, 2005) writes:

Scott Ritter, a former US Marine and UN weapons inspector in Iraq, claims that Bush has "signed off" on plans to bomb Iran in June 2005.

The government is urging a limited attack on Iran because they believe it could lead to a toppling of the religious leadership. "Within the soul of Iran there is a struggle between secular nationalists and reformers, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the fundamentalist Islamic movement," the consultant told me. "The minute the aura of invincibility which the mullahs enjoy is shattered, and with it the ability to hoodwink the West, the Iranian regime will collapse"—like the former Communist regimes in Romania, East Germany, and the Soviet Union. Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz share that belief, he said.

However, Hersh notes that Iran experts dispute the likelihood of a quick collapse of the Tehran regime, and say that a more likely consequence would be a stiffening of Iranian opposition.

Again, one cannot help recalling how similar expectations were voiced by administration insiders prior to the Iraq invasion—and how those expectations were dashed. The US administration appears to be cherry-picking expert advice, accepting only those

views that coincide with what higher-ups want to hear. This is evidently a policy emanating from top levels: George W. Bush himself is said to have told advisers that he wants to hear only good news.

However, the news following an invasion might be anything but good. According to a Reuters report by Amir Paivar, "Iran Promises 'Burning Hell' for Any Aggressor", dated Thursday, February 10, 2005:

Iran, facing mounting US pressure over its nuclear program, promised Thursday a "burning hell" for any aggressor as tens of

thousands marched to mark the 26th anniversary of its Islamic revolution.

"The Iranian nation does not seek war, does not seek violence and dispute. But the world must know that this nation will not tolerate any invasion," President Mohammad Khatami said in a fiery speech to the crowd in central Tehran.

"The whole Iranian nation is united against any threat or attack. If the invaders reach Iran, the country will turn into a burning hell for them," he added, as the crowd, braving heavy snow blizzards, chanted "Death to America!"

While such threats can mostly be chalked up to bluff and bravado (most of the Iranian war machinery is outdated and worn), Tehran does possess some weapons that are accurate and destructive—far more so than any used by Saddam Hussein against American forces. An example is the Russian-made *Sunburn* cruise missile, specifically designed to defeat the US *Aegis* radar defence system and said to be the most lethal anti-ship weapon in the world.

If attacked, Iran would likely foment a Shi'ite rebellion in Iraq against US occupation forces, an insurgency that might far surpass in extent and deadlines the current Sunni-led resistance. Moreover, Tehran might also unleash its 300 North Korean-engineered *Shahab-3* ballistic missiles on US bases in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. If Iran were invaded, its tactic would be to wage a guerrilla war similar to that undertaken by the Sunni-led resistance in Iraq. Tehran has

already announced efforts to increase the size of its seven-million-strong Basiji militia forces, which were deployed in human wave attacks against Iraq during the 1980s. According to news reports, tens of thousands of rifles are currently being handed out.

A US attack could have serious implications for international relations. Iran has spent the past few years cementing economic and military ties with China, Russia and the EU, and such efforts have intensified dramatically within past weeks. These nations, to varying degrees, view the US as a superpower that has outlived much of its usefulness to the rest of the world.

The US is now a liability in many respects: its immense national debt and trade deficits weigh down the global economy; its profligate consumption of resources leaves less to go around for other nations; its refusal to sign the Kyoto accord ensures a century of environmental collapse; and its arrogant militarism serves to undermine any hopes for cooperative solutions to future contests over dwindling resources.

No government wants to take on the US militarily. But Washington appears determined to control the choke-points of global resource flows. Thus the leaders of China, Russia—and, to a lesser extent, even those of the EU—would in their own view be acting in self-defence by drawing a line in the sand around Iran. Indeed, in recent weeks, Russia has begun selling some of its more advanced missiles to Syria, Venezuela and Iran, just as the US has amped up its rhetoric against these countries.

LIKELY SCENARIOS

What can we expect in the weeks and months ahead? Over the short term, we will see diplomatic wrangling and the seeding of news stories with inflammatory comments from unnamed government sources.

An example of the latter is a Reuters article ("Iran Will Know How to Build Bomb in 6 Months – Israel") by Andrew Cawthorne, dated February 15, in which anonymous Israeli officials are quoted as saying that Tehran is much closer to having atomic weapons than most US and European experts have estimated.

If and when the EU's talks with Iran break down, China and Russia seem likely to block any UN Security Council resolution designed to impose sanctions on Tehran. The US is no more likely to find support for punitive measures among the G8 nations, since Japan obtains about 15 per cent of its oil from Iran and has few easy alternative sources to make up the difference in the event of a trade embargo.

As noted above, the Bush administration evidently feels that an attack on Iran would result in a quick collapse of the government, and so Iranian dissident groups are no doubt being prepared to step into the power vacuum that might emerge. However, if the neoconservatives are as wrong here as they were in Iraq and the Tehran regime did *not* fall, then the US would be presented with a dilemma. If it withdrew, it would face defeat and humiliation. But a pursuit of invasion and militarily enforced regime change would be extremely costly in terms of dollars and human lives. How to justify either effort to the American people?

Because the likely outcomes are unpalatable, and because the ongoing occupation of neighbouring Iraq is not going well,

American officials would find it nearly impossible to launch an attack on Iran without having an adequate immediate pretext. Therefore Iran must be enticed to attack the US, or must be made to appear to do so.

The most likely scenario would be for Israel to take the lead in bombing Iranian nuclear facilities. To Tehran, this would signify US involvement, as Israeli planes would likely fly over US-controlled Iraqi air space. Iran would then predictably retaliate against both Israel and the US, perhaps by launching *Scud* missiles toward Israel and *Sunburn* cruise missiles against one or more American warships stationed in the Persian Gulf. The loss of an aircraft carrier or battleship with hundreds or thousands of American sailors on board could then summon a sufficient emotional response from the American people so that the full resources of the nation (including an immediate re-institution of the draft) could be mustered behind a three-pronged invasion of Iran from Iraq, Afghanistan and the Gulf.

Alternatively, if Iran did not take the bait and sink a US warship, Israel could do so under false flag, with the American people being told that the Iranian mullahs were to blame. Or an American city could be attacked from within by "terrorists", with Tehran again being assigned the guilt.

These events are most likely to commence before the end of 2005, as Iran cannot be permitted to open its oil bourse in March 2006.

Once the chain of events begins, it is anyone's guess how it might unwind over the ensuing weeks, months and perhaps even years. It seems more than likely that China would take this as an opportunity to dump its dollar holdings on world markets, thus tipping the US economy into a depression. Russia's response can only be guessed at.

Domestically, the US would likely institute draconian measures to monitor citizens' "patriotism" and severely restrict the freedoms of those who questioned the government's actions. And the US might well take the opportunity to widen the war to Venezuela and other sites of "tyranny" around the world.

While the Iraq invasion and its aftermath have been immensely destructive events, there are signs that what is in store will be far, far worse.

About the Author:

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